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JOHN HENRY LORIMER AND HIS ART

BY S. C. DE SOISSONS

PONDÉRATION was the word by which J. F. Millet summed up all the requisite qualities in a picture. If a painting possesses this balance or equipoise, as the term Millet used may be translated, it is a picture, though it may be but a mere sketch ; if it has not, no artful juxtaposition of pure colours, no elaboration of careful finish can make a picture of it. No theory will enable a man who has no eye for harmony of colour and harmony of proportion to make a good picture, any more than any theory of music will enable one who has not a musical ear to distinguish between concords and discords in music.

In the case of J. H. Lorimer, Taine's theory about the influence of surroundings was fully justified. Born (1856) in 'romantic Edinburgh,' and living for many years in an exquisitely tasteful and delightfully empty old Scotch castle, his eye seems to have acquired from childhood the sentiment of artistic proportion and harmonious colouring, and I do not think that even such professors as Chalmers and McTaggart, when he studied his art in the Royal Scottish Academy, or afterwards Carolus Duran, in Paris, could teach him this feeling for light and shade and this decided taste for the proportion of the interior, which are so distinctly personal qualities of his talent.

Being a Scotchman, Mr. Lorimer is naturally nearer to the Latin civilisation and tradition, 'the salt that saves us, the lighthouse-keeper' of our modern, rather turbulent civilisation, and this instinct of race saved him from going to



GIOVANNI PELOSSA
A PENCIL SKETCH
BY J. H. LORIMER



A PENCIL SKETCH
BY J. H. LORIMER

Germany, there to learn to put philosophy in his pictures, or to follow London in its æsthetic wagggeries.

Anybody can learn to draw, just as anybody can learn to write ; it is only genius or talent that is wanting to enable anyone to be an artist, and if we should accept—why not?—the axiom that art is man added to nature, we see that this subjective addition, this personal characteristic, which we have already emphasized in Mr. Lorimer's art, gives to it a peculiar and strongly individual character. Besides this, Mr. Lorimer knows how to concentrate the composition in such a way that it shows immediately the connection between the people, things and phenomena, composing his picture.

Let us take, for instance, his painting called *Grandmother's Birthday—Saying Grace*, purchased by the French Government, and hung in that choicest of modern picture galleries—the Luxembourg. We do not need to stand half-an-hour before it, or to ask our friends what it means, or to read a volume of history or philosophy in order to understand it, we comprehend immediately what the artist wished to represent.

Thus, our brain being perfectly free from thought, we delight our eyes with that exquisite harmony of colours, the stream of light passing through the window and bathing everything in the room, making every object and figure transparent, according to the laws of light and

METHOD IN COMPOSITION



FROM 'SONGS OF THE NORTH'
DRAWN IN PENCIL
BY J. H. LORIMER

shade in nature—in a word we delight our sense of sight, the true, the only purpose of art painting.

We experience the same artistic shock from his picture called *Lullaby*, for which Mr. Lorimer received third medal in the Salon of 1893. While his *Hunting-master*, also in the Luxembourg, and his *Ordination of Elders* reveal another quality of Mr. Lorimer's art, the knowledge how to bring out from the even surface of the canvas the plastic shape of a

human figure, which, notwithstanding the artistic inspiration he receives and the shape and colours of his imagination, he paints as if he were painting from nature. In primitive art, if it were not an ornament or symbol, but a realistic reproduction, there was no question about the representation of a certain grouping of colours, light and shape—it was only a question of faithful imitation of separate actions and things and the expression of their purpose.



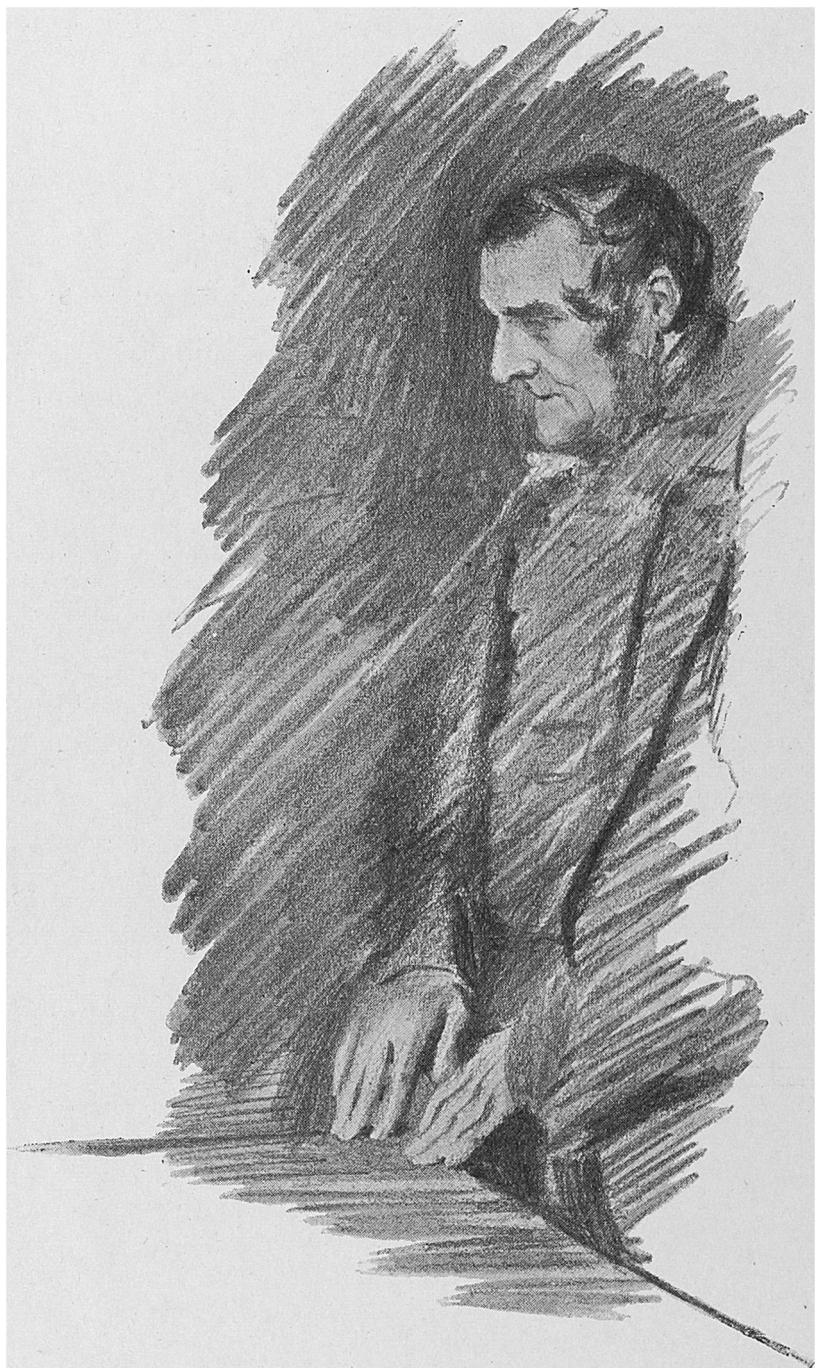
'MRS. EDWARD SALVESEN AND HER CHILDREN.'
FROM THE PICTURE BY J. H. LORIMER
EXHIBITED IN THE ROYAL ACADEMY, 1898



*PORTRAIT SKETCH
IN BLACK CHALK
BY J. H. LORIMER*

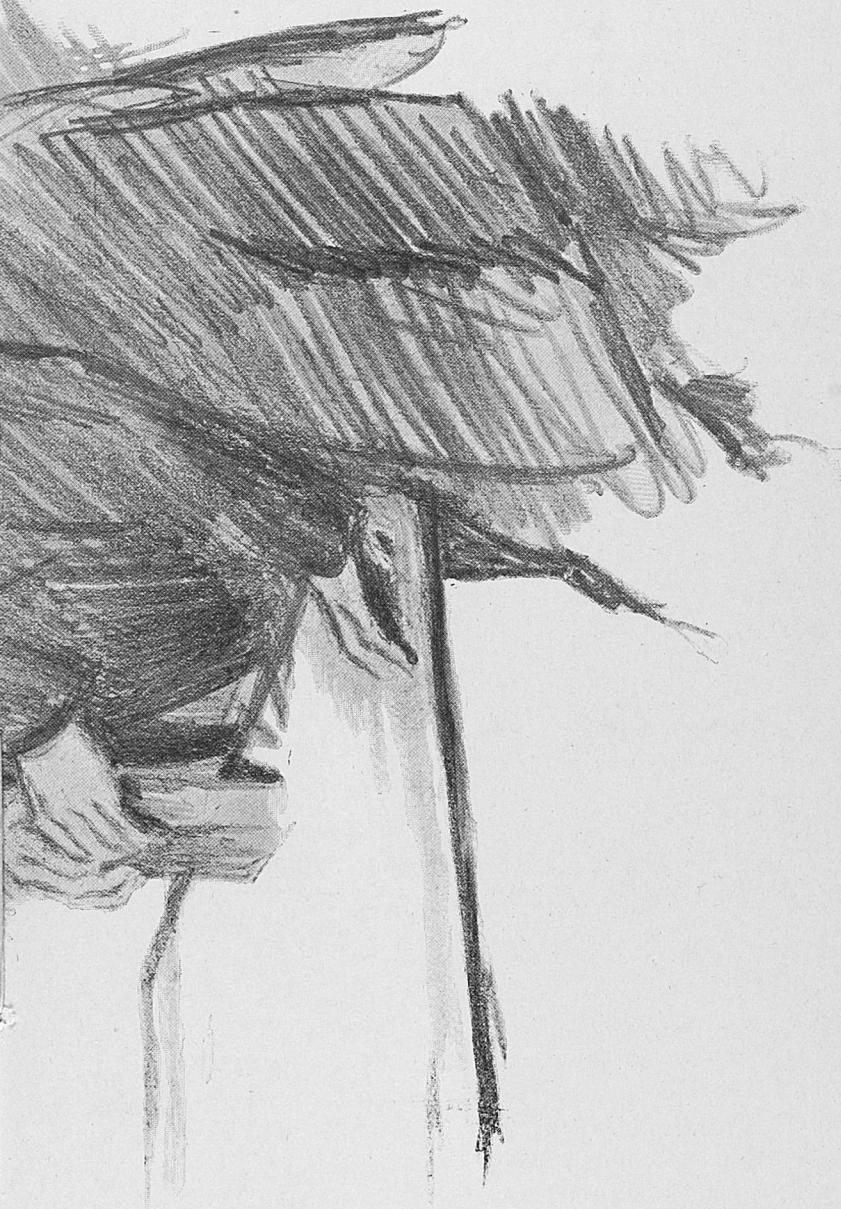


*A PENCIL STUDY
FOR 'THE ORDINATION OF ELDERS'
BY J. H. LORIMER*



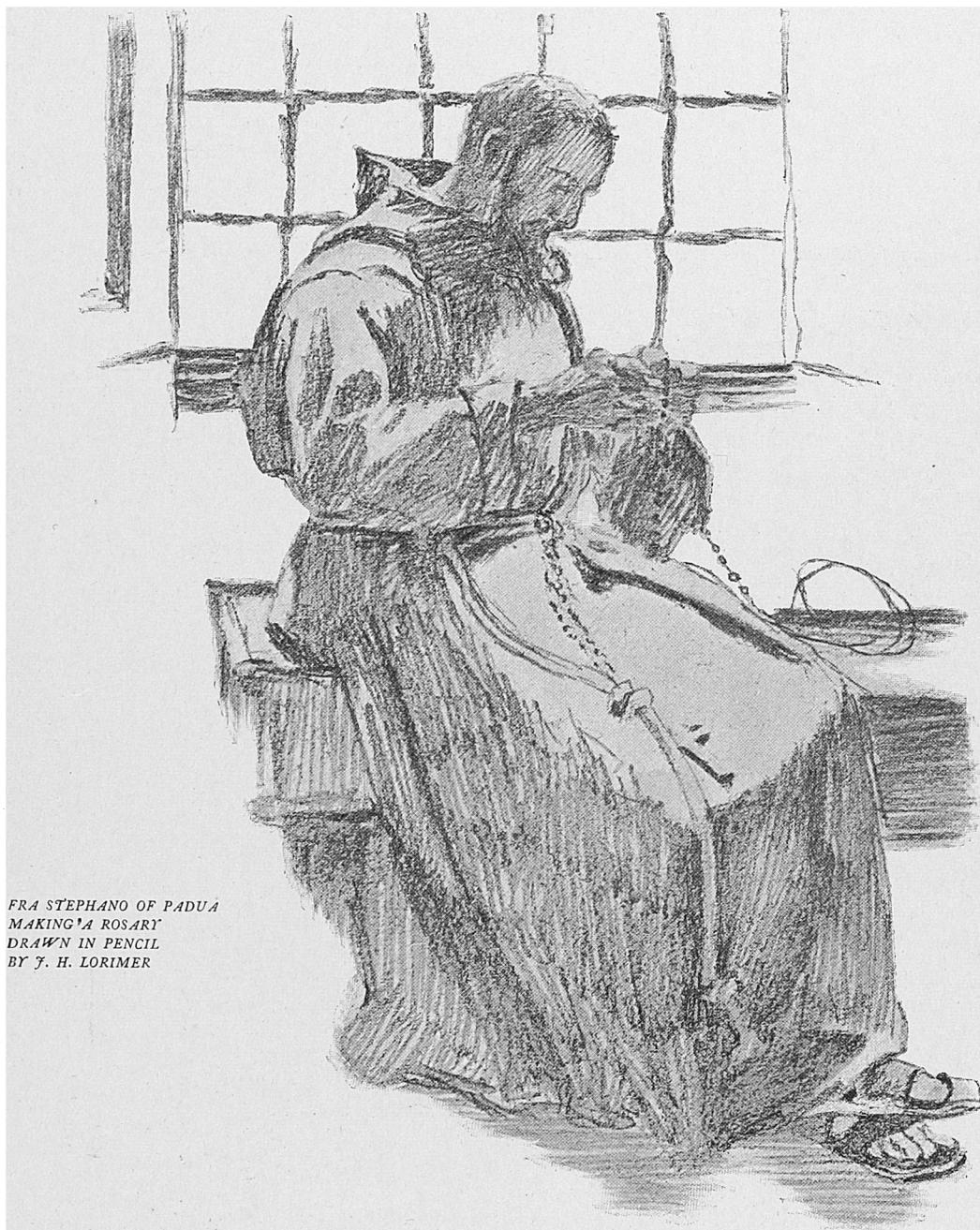
*A PENCIL STUDY
FOR 'THE ORDINATION OF ELDERS'
BY J. H. LORIMER*





A PENCIL STUDY
FOR 'THE ORDINATION OF ELTERS'
BY J. H. LORIMER

JOHN HENRY LORIMER



In proportion as man through higher or more complicated culture grew distinct from nature and could observe her, standing outside her, so only then he began to create as does an artist according to the ideas of to-day.

But when an artist stands in such a relation to nature, he creates the true work of art. And such is Mr. Lorimer's case.

When we turn our eyes to another picture—*The Eleventh Hour* (second medal in the Salon of 1896), by the same artist, we see at

once, that although the principal pre-occupation of Mr. Lorimer is the poetry of colour and the harmony of proportion, his *clair-obscur* is the triumph of art; for art does not show itself, but nature is reproduced in all its grandeur; while we also perceive the influence of the North, the country of dreams. While waiting for sun, which shows itself so seldom, the artist cannot live as do his brothers of the South, under the sun, which opens flowers and souls like plants; he must live within himself, outside

SONGS OF THE NORTH

of nature. He thinks more than he observes ; he soon mixes the world of fiction with the actual world, he paints psychological dramas, he tries to answer difficult or never-to-be-answered questions.

But, even in that kind of picture, to which belong also the drawings for *Songs of the North*, Mr. Lorimer preserves his Latin clearness, and no great effort is needful to understand his thoughts. The alliance of truth and sentiment, the close union between what the eye contemplates and the heart feels, is Mr. Lorimer's continual pre-occupation. The soul of the painter vibrates in his pictures, and he possesses that superior intelligence which permits him to express on canvas the thrill of his soul in the presence of the reality of things.

The composition, especially in pictures whose aim is to bring out some sentiment, to awaken certain thoughts in the spectator, is the most eloquent expression of the intelligence of a painter. In such pictures, light, colour, shape become factors which bring to every mind reminiscences or ideas, present the whole history of their origin, and finally harmonise his soul with the tones of the picture, or force his thoughts to follow that particular direction.

In compositions of that kind only artists come out victorious who are exceedingly frank and full of sentiment, who can be spectators for themselves, or those who calculate the means of the art of painting and its relation to the mind and to the nerves of the spectator. If he who paints is not himself agitated by different psychological questions, which he expresses in his pictures, he must be then an able psychologist and know how to play on the human soul.

I should be inclined to say that Mr. Lorimer belongs to the first category of painters, and that while he tries to express his thoughts, he still remembers that all theories about the purpose and the aim of art are generally too narrow, and do not embrace the whole artistic faculty ; he knows also that the aim of art is not to make certain facts and phenomena more difficult to the understanding—to entangle the human mind in conundrums—like hieroglyphics. On the contrary, in all his pictures one can see that he remembers one of the fundamental elements of æsthetic pleasures in this, that works of art ought

to give to a man the possibility of expressing the strongest possible emotions ; to awaken the most comprehensive ideas with the smallest effort of the brain and the least strain of the nerves.

Summarising all his qualities as a painter, one may say that he strains all local colours to the highest possible tone and harmonises them exactly in the proportion required in the picture light. In his paintings all local colours are transformed into brilliant tones, and are in such a perfect harmony that the colours melt into air, sun, sky, objects ; notwithstanding the difference which exists between his pictures and the real world, the illusion of the truth is perfect.

And although Mr. Lorimer does not look into life exclusively with the eyes of the soul—a circumstance which can be accounted for by the fact that he is the son of a Professor of Law in Edinburgh University, and comes of the race which produced such thinkers as Carlyle, who has tried to open the golden door of the invisible and of the infinite—in most of his pictures he smiles on the perishable world ; although in some of them, *The Ordination of Elders*, he suggests the immortal world also. He gathers the flower of life, although he notices that in its chalice there is a tear of heaven.

A few words about his portrait of *Mrs. Edward Salvesen and Children*, and I have finished with Mr. Lorimer's art. It may be considered a bold statement if I say that among 1,594 paintings on exhibition last year in the Royal Academy, this portrait, or rather picture, was the one which possessed the greatest proportion of the elements we spoke of above, necessary to make a perfect work of art. I do not even try to express in words the great charm which this picture had for me, through the harmony of its quiet and refined colouring, the most exquisite proportion, and the grace and elegance of the interior of a white room, in which Mrs. Salvesen is sitting on a blue gold-enframed sofa, while her children are standing, or rather playing round her. The painter has not given to his sitter a conventional pose ; he has surprised her in a familiar attitude of everyday life, with a simplicity which recalls the primitive masters. He has painted her with a simplicity which witnesses his earnestness in the presence of

JOHN HENRY LORIMER

nature. It is a masterpiece of drawing and colouring. It is truth itself, but ennobled in some way by the thought of the artist. To the carefulness of the workmanship he has brought his soul, not alone his eye and hand. Mr. Lorimer has thus proved himself to be an artist who fully believes that one should catch people in the freedom of their home surroundings, amidst the objects they love, and in an unconstrained attitude. The likeness is not only in the features, evidently for a certain category of spectators, to whom the different colour of a waistcoat or the inexact execution of a fall of lace are very important details in the decision as to whether a portrait is good or not. But such spectators could not be taken into consideration while there is the question of appreciation of a work of art from such a height as that on which we see it in our days.

As for the man himself, Mr. Lorimer belongs

to the quiet, rather shy, and unassuming cast. Shall I say that he is working hard? But everybody, who wishes to be somebody, works hard. We know that Mr. Lorimer is already somebody, and, naturally, he attained his position by work, by hard work. His philosophy of life? Well, he was enthusiastic about the romantic, ideal sentiments expressed by Edmond Rostand, in 'Cyrano de Bergerac,' and while walking one evening last June down Piccadilly he quoted with enthusiasm:

*'Rêver, rire, passer, être seul, être libre,
Avoir l'œil qui regarde bien, la voix qui vibre.'*

*'Travailler sans souci de gloire ou de fortune,
A tel voyage, auquel on pense, dans la lune!'*

*'Grimper par ruse au lieu de s'elever par force?
Non, merci.'*



*IN THE FRAUEN KIRCHE, MUNICH
A SKETCH BY J. H. LORIMER*